

PIDDLETRENTHIDE

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The London Times devotes a regular column to the reassignments of Church of England clerics. Buried among the announcements of August 21, 1974 was the following:

Diocese of Salisbury. The Rev J.E.B. Cattell, Vicar of Piddletrenthide with Alton Pancras and Plush, to be priest-in-charge of Buckhorn Weston and Kington Magna.

This simple notice resulted in a flood of letters from readers during the next fortnight, many commenting on other strange British place-names. Here is a sampling, for the delectation of Word Ways readers:

Sir, There can surely never have been a more musical-sounding appointment in The Times than that of August 21, announcing that the vicar of Piddletrenthide with Alton Pancras and Plush is to be priest-in-charge of Buckhorn Weston and Kington Magna. Is there really a parish of Piddletrenthide with Alton Pancras and Plush? If so, I will have to retire there; it certainly is an improvement on "Maidstone". In 30 years' time, however, when I am ready to retire, that parish, too, will probably have a post-code, and it will merely be known as "Pwapap", for short. P. H. H. Moore

Sir, When, some years ago I was down in that part of the world I saw a signpost which, on one of its arms, read: Plush, Folly, Mappowder, Piddletrenthide. Simon Borrett

Sir, Mr Moore enquires in your issue of August 24 whether there really is such a place as Piddletrenthide. Yes, Mr Moore, there is; it's in West Dorset and is as delightful as its name implies. We also have Toller Pocorum, Sydling St Nicholas, Whitchurch Canoncorum, and Ryme Intrinseca, to name but four others. Can anywhere in the country match this area for the haunting quality of its village names? Trevor Jones

Sir, Mr Trevor Jones (Letters, August 30) has only to cross the border into Somerset to find village names just as evocative as those in Dorset. Wyke Champflower, Chilton Cantelo, Huish Episcopi, and Upton Noble are all with a few miles of my own village. Digby Meller

Sir, We read about Soho, Piccadilly, Petty France and Bedlam. Can you assure me that there really are such places in London? R. Belgrave, West Lodge, Piddlehinton, Dorset

Sir, Mr Moore's choice of parish for retirement is indeed difficult to fault (Piddletrenthide with Alton Pancras and Plush), but for sheer pleasure to the ear the redeployment of ecclesiastical strength in Yorkshire which appeared in your columns some 14 years ago remains supreme: "the Rev G. D. Beaglehole, Vicar of Kexby with Wilberfoss to be Vicar of Bossall with Buttercrambe". Aidan Reynolds

Sir, I have looked in vain for any mention of Sixpenny Handley (6d Handley) in Dorset in your correspondence columns. Are we to assume that it is now 2 1/2 p Handley? Annys, Mother Superior, Convent of St John Baptist

Sir, For sheer deployment of ecclesiastical strength as well as for aural harmony Yorkshire can do even better than Mr Reynolds is prepared to allow, for in 1960 you also announced: "The Rev G. Christie, Rector of Roos with Tunstall-in-Holderness, Vicar of Garton with Grimston and Hilston and Rural Dean of South Holderness to be Vicar of Pocklington with Yapham-cum-Meltonby and Owsthorpe with Kilnwick Percy, and Millington with Great Givendale, and Rural Dean of Pocklington." It is understandably with regret that I sign myself as Michael Peel, Rector of Iver Heath (only).

Sir, We in Hampshire can surely beat them all with our three hearty Wallops -- Over, Middle and Nether. A. Murray

Sir, One signpost in Shropshire reads simply: Homer 1, Wigwig 2. How's that for brevity and wit? Anna A. M. Wells

Sir, I have greatly enjoyed this correspondence. I respectfully submit my own personal contribution. Gonville Aubie Ffrench-Beytagh, Rector of the United Parishes of Saint Vedast alias Foster with St Michael-le-Querne and St Matthew, Friday Street with St Peter, Cheap; St Alban, Wood Street with St Olave, Silver Street, St Michael, Wood Street and St Mary Staining; St Lawrence Jewry with St Mary Magdalene, Milk Street and St Michael Bassishaw; and St Anne & St Agnes, Gresham Street with St John Zachary, Gresham Street; and St Mary Aldermanbury

Sir, My current favourite in this class for any country is the eructative name of a station on the railway line from Brussels to Louvain: Erps-Kwerps. Margaret Barclay

Sir, A few miles to the East of Oxford on the A40 a signpost points to "The Baldons". This simple omnibus name conceals the identities of Great Baldon, Little Baldon, Baldon in-between, Marsh Baldon, Toot Baldon, Baldon-on-th-Green, and Baldon. John H. Edmonds

Sir, May I on behalf of Scotland offer a brief contribution to this correspondence and draw attention to the tiny but ancient fishing village on the south shore of the Firth of Forth, which proudly bears the name "Society"? Maurice Lyell, Puddephat's Farm

Sir, The first place listed in Part Two of the 1961 Census Index of Place Names aptly describes the efforts of your readers in this silly correspondence: Labour-in-vain. M. R. Huxley

Sir, As a foreigner, may I say how enjoyable has been your correspondence on this subject, for in my country we do not have such quaint place-names. K. J. Wyatt, Turramurra, Kur-ring-gai, New South Wales

AN ONOMASTIC OLIO

Leslie Dunkling, the author of the 1974 The Guinness Book of Names (Guinness Superlatives, 2 Cecil Court, London Road, Enfield, Middlesex, England), asserts that most books on onomastics (the study of names) are too narrow in both subject-matter and approach: they concentrate on the etymology of surnames and place-names. Although etymology is important, the psychology and sociology of names are subjects of much greater interest to the casual reader: why do certain names come into and go out of fashion? what associations are roused in people's minds by certain names? Although surnames and place-names have been comprehensively researched, far less attention has been given to other nomenclatures: street names, pub names, trade names, house names, field names, nicknames, ship names, animal (pet) names, and the like. Many of these, particularly house names and ship names, reveal a high degree of creativity on the part of the namer; I especially like the anecdote of the sailors who nicknamed the sloop Weston-super-Mare "Aggie-on-Horseback" after the well-known naval benefactress Agnes Weston. The book has imaginative typography, with titles printed in red and illustrative names in the text printed in boldface type. It has a large number of historical drawings and illustrations, and many fascinating lists of specific classes of names. It's a pity that it is not generally available in this country; however, it can be ordered from England for the rather reasonable price of 3.20 pounds sterling (postage may be extra).